

NCA  
VOC FOR IOP/FN  
BACKGROUNDER NO. 1-0524  
LINDA CASHDAN

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#### AMERICAN METRIC COUNCIL MEETS

ANNCR:

THE UNITED STATES IS "GOING METRIC." THAT IS THE HOPEFUL PROPHECY OF THE AMERICAN NATIONAL METRIC COUNCIL, A VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATION OF BUSINESS LEADERS WHICH HELD ITS ANNUAL MEETING IN WASHINGTON D.C. THIS WEEK (4/5 -4/7). LINDA CASHDAN HAS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT:

VOICE:

IT WOULD BE A PERFECT BICENTENNIAL GESTURE: TWO HUNDRED YEARS AFTER BREAKING AWAY FROM MOTHER ENGLAND, AMERICA IS ATTEMPTING TO BREAK AWAY FROM THE BRITISH SYSTEM OF WEIGHTS AND MEASUREMENTS. BUT THE DRAMA OF REBELLION IS LESSENER BY THE FACT THAT GREAT BRITAIN LED THE WAY. ELEVEN YEARS AGO, THE UNITED KINGDOM ANNOUNCED ITS INTENTION TO GRADUALLY CONVERT TO THE METRIC SYSTEM. AS A RESULT, THE UNITED STATES STANDS ALMOST ALONE WITH BRUNEI, BURMA, LIBERIA, AND YEMEN... THE ONLY NON-METRIC COUNTRIES IN THE WORLD.

BUT NOT FOR LONG. LAST DECEMBER (1975) PRESIDENT FORD SIGNED A BILL TO ENCOURAGE THE USE OF A METRIC SYSTEM OF MEASUREMENTS IN THE UNITED STATES. AND, AS EVIDENCED AT THE AMERICAN METRIC COUNCIL MEETING, THERE ARE NEW SIGNS OF A "METRIC MOOD" ACROSS THE COUNTRY. THE TREND IS WHOLEHEARTEDLY SUPPORTED BY MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS, BECAUSE THEY HAVE THE MOST TO GAIN. AT THIS POINT, IN ORDER TO DEAL ON A WORLD MARKET, SUCH CORPORATIONS HAVE TO

"DUAL DIMENSION" THEIR PRODUCTS -- DEVELOPING METRIC PRODUCTS FOR EXPORT, NON-METRIC PRODUCTS FOR NATIONAL CONSUMPTION. IT IS COSTLY, CONFUSING, AND CREATING TRADE BARRIERS.

BUT INDUSTRY IS NOT THE ONLY METRIC-MINDED SEGMENT OF THE POPULATION. CONSUMER AND LABOR ORGANIZATIONS, AND EDUCATORS ALSO WERE INTERESTED PARTICIPANTS AT THE AMERICAN METRIC COUNCIL CONFERENCE. THEY WERE INVOLVED EITHER BECAUSE THEY FEEL CONVERSION IS PRACTICAL, OR BECAUSE THEY FEEL IT IS INEVITABLE. AND, FOR EITHER REASON, THEY WANT THE CHANGE TO BE AS EASY AS POSSIBLE.

THE COUNCIL POINTED OUT THAT A NATIONAL METRIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGN IS ALREADY UNDERWAY, FEATURING METRIC COOKING CLASSES, HIGHWAY SIGNS, AND BRIEF RADIO PROGRAMS WITH REASSURING NEWS. "IF YOU'RE DIETING AND WANT TO LOSE TEN POUNDS," A CHICAGO BROADCASTER CHEERFULLY EXPLAINED TO HIS LISTENERS RECENTLY, "UNDER THE METRIC SYSTEM, YOU ONLY HAVE TO LOSE FOUR AND A HALF KILOGRAMS"

IN THE SPORTS WORLD, REACTION IS MIXED. BASEBALL STADIUMS HAVE BEGUN POSTING METRIC DISTANCE DESIGNATIONS TO INDICATE HOW FAR A BALL IS HIT. BUT AMERICAN FOOTBALL IS FACED WITH EITHER CHANGING THE DIMENSIONS OF THE FIELD -- WHICH WOULD ALTER THE GAME ITSELF -- OR DEALING WITH CUMBERSOME FRACTIONS. INSTEAD OF RUNNING TEN YARDS FOR A FIRST DOWN, FOR EXAMPLE, A PLAYER WOULD HAVE TO RUN 9.144 METERS. THE PLAYER COULD DO IT, BUT COULD THE BROADCASTER SAY IT? GOLF -- THE PROFESSIONAL GOLFERS ASSOCIATION HAS DECLARED -- IS SO WEDDED TO YARD MEASUREMENTS THAT IT MAY NEVER GO METRIC, BUT INSTEAD REMAIN A RELIC OF THE PAST.

IT MAY BE GOOD SO HAVE A FEW RELICS, FOR HISTORICAL PURPOSES AT LEAST. FOR THE AMERICAN METRIC COUNCIL FORESEES A NEW GENERATION OF AMERICAN CHILDREN -- THE YOUNGEST -- WHO ARE ABOUT TO LEARN THE METRIC SYSTEM NOT IN CONVERSION, BUT FIRST HAND. THEY WILL BE THE FIRST NATIVE-BORN AMERICANS EVER TO "THINK METRIC." AND FOR THESE CHILDREN, RELICS LIKE THE GAME OF GOLF MAY PROVIDE AN EDUCATIONAL LESSON...PROVOKING PENETRATING QUESTIONS, SUCH AS "DADDY, WHAT IS A YARD?"

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